

**Message #4****II Samuel 2:12-32**

Years ago there was a book that was aimed at ministers. The book was entitled “Well Intentioned Dragons.” In that book a piece of advice was given to a minister who was a candidate for a new ministry. The piece of advice was take careful notice of who picks you up at the airport because more often than not they will turn out to be your biggest problem. In DeMotte and here in Kalamazoo that was not true. However, in Pocatello that was absolutely true. The two men who picked us up at the airport turned out to be two of our worst problems.

Now when we come to this text and Abner shows up to have a meeting with David’s people, it is cause for some suspicious observation. We may recall that the last time David yelled at Abner from the side of a mountain after taking Saul’s spear and water bottle, he inferred he was a “girly man” and said he was a lousy military commander (I Sam. 26:15-16). He asked him “Are you a man”? We may be certain that did not go over well with Abner.

Furthermore, when Abner declared that Ish-bosheth was king of Israel, he is actually defying David and more than that he is defying God (II Sam. 2:8-10). Abner knew that David was to be the next king of Israel and he was doing everything in his power to stop that.

**GOD’S WILL FOR DAVID TO BE KING OF ISRAEL WAS NOT AN OVERNIGHT OR EASY ACCOMPLISHMENT AND THE ROAD TO BEING KING WILL BE A ROAD OF HOSTILE ADVERSITY AND WARFARE.**

When Abner shows up here in Benjamin’s territory, we may be absolutely certain his motives are not honorable. You cannot trust this man. He is not going to have a meeting to build a lasting friendship with David:

- 1) He wanted to get some insight and perspective of what David was going to do next.
- 2) He wanted to get more military support from those Benjamites who were pro-Saul (**v. 25**).  
Perhaps he thought he could recover some of Saul’s soldiers who defected to David.
- 3) He wanted to establish an area in the land of Benjamin where Ish-bosheth could rule.
- 4) He wanted to figure out a way to attack David.

His motives are not pure. He is a self-glorifying proud man. There are six historical facts God reveals here:

**HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Abner and his servants have a meeting with David’s leader Joab and his servants. 2:12-13**

Abner is the son of Ner, and he went out from Mahanaim to the pool of Gibeon with the servants of Ish-bosheth, who was the son of Saul. By reminding us that Abner was the son of Ner, we are reminded of Abner’s connection to Saul. He was Saul’s cousin. Ner was Saul’s uncle (I Sam. 14:50). Now this meeting took place at Gibeon.

Gibeon was a city that was set aside for Aaronic priests (Josh. 21:17; I Chron. 6:60). The distance from Mahanaim to this spot was about 50 miles.

The pool of Gibeon is a man-made water reservoir that is 37 feet in diameter and 82 feet deep.

Now Joab was the son of Zeruiah and he was David's top military man. This is our first introduction to Joab. He was David's nephew and commander of his army. He was a very loyal and trustworthy soldier.

Zeruiah was David's sister (I Chronicles 2:15-16). The fact that her name is repeatedly mentioned is because it is stressed that Zeruiah had a very close connection to David: she was his sister.

When Abner and his soldiers came to the reservoir, Joab got word of it and took his soldiers about 23 miles north of Hebron to the other side of the reservoir. He may have thought that Abner was moving against the priests to execute them. But Joab decided to move north to the area to determine what was happening.

**Verse 13** says they met and sat down. That would seem to suggest that initially this was not warfare combat. The impression is that this meeting is somewhat peaceful.

**HISTORICAL FACT #2** – Abner proposes a military contest between 12 of his men against 12 of David's men. **2:14-17**

When you read this, you do have to wonder if Abner was remembering the Philistine challenge concerning Goliath, that one from Saul's army fight him in some winner take all fight (I Sam. 17:8-10). It was that very challenge that brought David to the front of Israel.

For whatever reason, Abner decided to have some sort of hand-to-hand combat competition between 12 of his soldiers versus 12 of David's soldiers (**2:14-15**). I am not sure that Joab thinks this was originally proposed to be a life and death fight.

Now it almost appears as though Joab thought it was supposed to be like a jousting competition; like some wrestling competition. I don't think that Joab initially thought this was to be a life or death bout. But that is what it turned into.

According to **verse 16**, each combatant seized his opponent by the head and plunged his sword into the opponent's side so they all fell down dead together.

Each combatant had a sword and initially apparently all 24 men died. They named the place "Helkath-hazzurim" which means "the field of the sharp sword edges."

According to **verse 17**, a battle broke out and the battle raged on and in the end David won and Abner and his men from Israel were beaten.

Now before we move on in the narrative, it seems to me that Joab should have never agreed to this. Joab is the kind of man who seems to be quick to jump the gun. In fact, if we jump ahead several years in time, David does not forget about this and in the end he will tell Solomon to kill Joab (I Kings 2:5, 6, 28-35).

### **HISTORICAL FACT #3 – David’s nephews pursue Abner. 2:18-24**

**David’s sister Zeruiah had three sons, Joab, Abishai and Asahel (I Chron. 2:16).** These three will prove to be very loyal to their uncle David. Abishai had actually risked his own life and gone with David into the camp of Saul and wanted to kill Saul with one thrust of his spear (I Sam. 26:8). These three nephews of David were very loyal and faithful.

Now Asahel was a fast, long distance runner (2:18). He was very light on his feet and as fast as the gazelles. Now a gazelle can actually run a short burst up to 60 miles per hour. They can run for some distance at 30-40 miles per hour. Now the fastest runners in the world can do a burst of speed of up to 28 miles per hour.

Notice carefully what is stated, he is “swiftfooted **AS** one of the gazelles.” Whenever you use the adverb “like” or “as,” it is a simile which is a figure of speech. So Asahel literally cannot run 60 miles per hour, but the statement is “as” a gazelle, he was very fast.

According to **verse 19**, when Abner fled, Asahel pursued him and went straight after him not getting sidetracked from his focus. He was determined to catch him. It appears as though Asahel is not armed with anything but his hands.

According to **verse 20**, when Abner looked behind him and saw him charging, he asked if it were Asahel and he answered yes. Abner is a very seasoned warrior and Asahel is not.

Abner said well turn away from chasing me and destroy one of the young men and take all he has. As John Woodhouse said, Abner was telling Asahel to pick on someone your own size (*II Samuel*, p. 91). Asahel was no match for Abner. But as **verse 21** says, Asahel was not willing to stop following him.

Sometimes it is wise to realize this is way out of my league. Just because one has ambition and zeal does not mean he is skilled to get the job done.

According to **verse 22**, Abner again told Asahel to stop following him because he did not want to kill him. He tried to persuade him by saying he would not be able to look at Joab if he did that. The truth is Asahel was no match for Abner. Abner had superior weapons and was an experienced and seasoned soldier and warrior.

But according to **verse 23**, Asahel refused to turn and his speed caught up to Abner so Abner apparently came to a dead stop and struck him in the belly with his spear and the spear went through him completely and he died right there.

His body fell to the ground and everyone was stunned. Apparently the realization that David's nephew and Joab's brother had been killed caused all to stand still when they saw this.

But as **verse 24** says, Joab and Abishai pursued Abner until dark and their chase ended on the hill of Ammah in front of the city of Giah, near the entrance of the wilderness area of Gibeon.

**HISTORICAL FACT #4** – Abner and many forces try to end the fight with Joab and his forces. **2:25-28**

Abner wanted to have peace. When Abner got to the top of some hill, many sons of Benjamin stood with him.

According to **verse 26**, Abner called out to Joab. He called out three questions:

**Question #1** - Shall we continue to devour each other forever with a sword? **2:26a**

Abner is the one who started the fight.

**Question #2** - Don't you realize that this will not end well for anyone? **2:26b**

It will not end well for Abner's side because David's side is winning.

**Question #3** - When will you tell your people to stop following and killing their brothers? **2:26c**

If you are so concerned about brotherhood, then why don't you stop opposing David, the king of Israel?

In **verse 27**, Joab said if you had not spoken to us this morning and started all of this we would have never been in this mess. We would have never pursued you in the first place and now you want us to stop.

Now it does appear as if Joab saw that this was not the time to finish this fight. He probably saw the perch of Abner and the men with him and decided the best thing to do was to temporarily put a halt to this.

So in **verse 28**, Joab blew the trumpet and the conflict ended.

**HISTORICAL FACT #5** – Abner and his men return to Mahanaim. **2:29**

All that night Abner and his men moved through the Arabah and crossed the Jordan, which is a dangerous crossing to make at night, and they arrived back to Mahanaim, which was the capital city of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul.

**HISTORICAL FACT #6** – Joab and his men returned to Hebron. **2:30-31**

Joab and his men traveled south to Bethlehem, where they buried Asahel in his father's tomb. From there they went to David's capital city of Hebron.

According to **verse 30**, David lost 19 men plus Asahel in the fight. So David had lost a total of 20 men. If we realize that 12 of his men were lost in the initial combat, then all David lost was Asahel and seven other men.

However, Abner lost 360 men. For every man David lost, Abner lost 18 men. So even though Joab may not have known it, Abner is the one who really wanted the truce here because he was losing big.

Now in **verse 32**, we are introduced to the city of Bethlehem. Bethlehem was the place of God's chosen king (I Sam. 16:4). Bethlehem would be the place one could look for help and deliverance.

This would be the place where the King originated and this would be the place that gave birth to the King of Kings who will one day reign.

God is a warrior and He wants peace and offers peace to any sinner who will receive His Son. As Paul would later write, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

The problem is the vast majority of people don't want what He offers. The question is do we?